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The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution by Timothy Tackett. The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2015, 480 pp. ISBN: 9780674736559, Hardback, £25.00.

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The use of personal correspondence and popular media, while not new, has recently taken on a life of its own in the field of historical research. Instead of leaving the telling of history in the hands of official records, historians have shifted their focus to these intimate narratives, giving readers an "on the ground" view of the events that helped shape our past. While these documents, taken within no context but themselves, cannot be seen as a full view of the events that helped shape these moments in history, in conversation with each other, they begin to explain the popular views that gave rise to the ideals of our collective existence. Timothy Tackett casts an eye towards these popular narratives within the context of the French Revolution. Using the personal correspondence, journals, diaries, and popular media of over a hundred French figures, Tackett proposes that the emotional motivations behind the Revolution deserve just as much academic attention as the political ones.

While Tackett spends time on every phrase of the revolution until the end of the Terror, his primary focus is the conditions in which the terror came about. How, Tackett muses, does a revolution that starts as an unwillingness of the Second Estate to pay Louis XVI more for his financial malfeasance turn into an absolute revolt of the Third Estate, led by the likes of Robespierre and his bourgeois allies? The use of media and correspondence is the first piece of the puzzle that Tackett offers. Through personal correspondence, the educated members of the Third Estate are able to share their ideas with one another. Some of the correspondence used gives us insight into the simple animations of *the* political machine, while others give us a view of the personal lives of those responsible and how they affected the actions and planning of those in charge. We learn that Robespierre, while educated and successful, spent his early years borrowing money to stay afloat, all the while influenced by his own upbringing that, while not of peasant stock, was one that, in its loneliness and poverty, led to the radical views that would eventually usher in the deposition of the monarchy. The emotional weight is stark: Robespierre evolves from an idealistic proponent of Republican thought into, in Tackett's view, a hell-bent revolutionary, determined to preserve the ideals of France at whatever cost.

To say that Tackett's volume focuses solely on the major players of the Terror is short-sighted. Views are presented from both men and women, both those in France and those on the outside (including France's colonies, primarily Haiti, which would be swept up in the fervor of its own revolution shortly thereafter) and of people from all different forms of birth, profession, and nationality. One thing that remains constant, however, is how the revolution changes these individuals. A nation stuck in feudalism becomes, in short order, one reformed through the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The views of those involved follow this shift; an idea once seen as inconceivable becomes a reality simply though the determination of the players involved. Tackett does a brilliant job in capturing this groundswell of shifting emotions, and, in his research, finds that, in conversation with modernity, the heroes of France during the terror would be viewed as domestic terrorists. As much as this volume could be seen as excusing the

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excesses of the Reign of Terror, instead it should be argued that Tackett offers nuanced reasoning for how such emotions can evolve from the high ideals held by those who incited Revolution in France.

Tackett's book comes to a climax with the trial of Louis, with letters and articles flying back and forth between subjects in a dizzying manner. Views are given, received, adapted and tossed aside with blinding speed; what one claims in private correspondence to be inconceivable becomes a promoted view in popular press soon thereafter. Allies become enemies, loyal French become traitors, and a revolutionary frenzy develops, all played out in the public and private thoughts put forth by Tackett's subjects. If the book has a weakness, it is in the fact that the correspondence and personal thoughts presented represent only the thoughts of what would have been the educated of France. This, however, is unavoidable in the context of the primary source material. Very little has been written on the thoughts of the uneducated masses that made up the majority of the oppressed in France, and, thus, we are forced to rely on the opinions of the educated in regards to what the uneducated were feeling. In this regard, Tackett does a wonderful job in striking a balance in presenting the views of all classes involved. It would be easy for such a volume to become either a bemoaning of the loss of status of the upper class or a dedication to the fervor of the bourgeois leadership of the Revolution. Tackett, however, steers a center course, providing insight in how all views are presented.

The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution provides research in an area of revolutionary France that is sorely underrepresented: the on-the-ground views of those who hold responsibility for the evolution of high ideals into popular terror. By using personal writings, correspondence, and popular media to build his case for the emotional revolutionary process, Tackett explores new ground. This book joins the canon of a long list of must-reads pertaining to one of history's more extensively researched topics, by providing a fresh new perspective into an event that changed the course of human history in a short span of six years.